

Owner will build 2 new hotels

By Tony Lombardo | Staff Writer
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Washington Road is getting a double dose of hospitality next year in the form of a "hotel plaza" near Interstate 20.

By March 15, a Country Inns & Suites franchise will be built on Center West Parkway near Washington Road, owner Jugal Purohit said. Mr. Purohit also is planning to open another, unnamed franchise next year.

Both hotels will house about 60 rooms and will be more than 30,000 square feet each. The hotels represent a \$7 million investment and will create about 34 jobs, he said.

When completed, the hotels will make up half of the owner's "plaza," which includes the similar-size Best Western Garden City Inn and the Amerihost Inn, which are near Washington Road and Center West Parkway.

All four hotels will be accessible by Sherwood Drive and a common driveway off Center West Parkway.

The two hotels will occupy a 1.75-acre parcel Mr. Purohit recently acquired for \$465,000. Clearing of the wooded lot is expected to begin this fall.

Building new hotels is the key for keeping Washington Road competitive in landing overnight guests, Mr. Purohit said.

"There are a lot of people coming to town, but they want to stay in a good, fresh room," he said.

Franchise names also are important because customers often have brand loyalty, he said.

His hotel plaza appeals to the older crowd with Best Western and to families with Amerihost, he said.

He said his new hotels also will cater to business travelers.

With little land available on Washington Road, owners of older hotels might need to tear down and build again to remain competitive, Mr. Purohit said.

In 2004, he demolished a Motel 6 where Best Western and Amerihost now stand.

The four hotels could stimulate some improvements of older hotels on the road, said Barry White, the executive director of the Augusta Metropolitan Convention & Visitors Bureau.

"Competition is healthy," Mr. White said. "It may encourage some of the other hotels to keep up their standards."

Some older hotels in the area have lost their franchise flags in their old age, including the Radisson, now the Augusta Suites; Holiday Inn, now the Augusta Inn & Convention Center; and the Sheraton, now Augusta Towers.

The influx of franchise names could lead to independent hotels attempting to regain a franchise name, Mr. White said.